

sternum keel, the second one on the abdomen, with some part of its intestines bulging out. There is no evidence to show what had happened. Finally, on 5th July the larger chick fledged.

July 10, 1996

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24. POSSIBLE COMMUNAL NESTING IN THE WYNAAD LAUGHING THRUSH *GARRULAX DELESSERTI DELESSERTI* (JERDON)

The Wynaad laughing thrush, *Garrulax delesserti*, occurs in southern Western Ghats, in humid rain forest with dense understory (Ali 1968, BIRDS OF KERALA). This bird lives in flocks.

On 18th April, 1994, about 4 km from Thekkady on the Mangaladevi road, in Periyar Tiger Reserve, in a semi-evergreen forest, I came across a flock of 16 birds in the morning. They were foraging on the ground "rummaging amongst the mulch", turning over dead leaves, and uttering chattering calls.

At 0950 hrs I saw one bird followed by another flying to an isolated 4 m tall *Actinodaphne hirsuta* tree with a rootlet in its beak. Two more birds were seen following immediately, one with a rootlet and another without. I saw a nest under construction, about

3 m high on the central fork of one branch of the tree. The birds were adding nesting material to it, and building a cup shape. The nesting activity continued until 1150 hours. Three birds were bringing the nesting material and the fourth, always accompanied them without any material. The nest building birds seemed to be unconcerned about my presence. Other members of the group were foraging about 5 m away. The birds disappeared through a dense thicket at 1155 hrs and could not be traced. I could come back to the place only after 2 days and the nest was found damaged.

October 27, 1995

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25. FEEDING BY ROSEFINCH *CARPODACUS ERYTHRINUS* (PALLAS) ON APHID SECRETION

The usual food of rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) includes mostly seeds (of weeds, millet, linseed, vetch, *Polygonum*, bamboo, etc.), flower buds, fruits and berries such as mulberry, raspberries, wild cherries, banyan and pipal figs, *Lantana*, *Maesa*, *Trema*; also nectar of *Erythrina*, *Salmalia*, *Butea*, *Woodfordia* and other blossoms. There is a single record of insects (Ali and Ripley, HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Vol. 10, pp 165, 1974). Witherby, Jourdain, Ticehurst and Tucker, in HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS Vol. 1, pp 89, 1938 mention young birds taking insects and larvae. In an openwooded grove near Dombivli (Dist. Thane, Maharashtra), a migratory flock was observed feeding on aphid

secretion which was present on immature fruits of *Holoptelea integrifolia*.

The aphid-laden young green samaroid fruit of *H. integrifolia* show sweet, sticky droplets of the honey dew secreted by aphids on the seed wings. It is commonly observed that ants attend aphid infested plant parts for this secretion and in turn defend the aphids in a symbiotic relationship. However, it was interesting to see the birds visiting these fruits for the honeydew not only once but regularly for about half a month (late January, 1994). Birds were observed daily, either between 0630 to 1000 hrs or between 1700 to 1830 hrs. Though there are many trees of *Holoptelea* in the area, most birds of the flock

used to swarm on one or two selected aphid-rich trees. One or at the most two days were taken by the birds, which was dependent on the fruit numbers to finish up the majority of the fruits. These fruits from which the sweet honey dew had been removed had fallen to the ground at the base of the tree. Then, though a few birds lingered on the same tree, most of them shifted to nearby trees. Later, due to the scarcity of fresh young fruits (and consequently honey dew), and due to full blooming of *Salmalia malabarica*, *Erythrina indica* etc., the birds turned to these trees.

Though it is reported that various flower buds form part of the regular diet of the rosefinch (Ali and Ripley 1974), they were never observed taking flower buds of *H. integrifolia*. Because of the large number of aphids, the birds got "aphid cluster" on their beak-commissures and were seen to clean their beaks by rubbing them on the stem after feeding on one or two fruits. It is however quite possible that the aphids might have been swallowed along with the secretion.

While making observations, some points arose which remain unresolved. These are:

1. The only other bird visiting the fruits apart from finches were some warblers which made occasional visits more for aphids than for the honey dew. The common rivals of the rosefinch for flower nectar such as drongos,

mynas, crows etc., which compete for the nectar kept away from this sweet honey dew. Considering this, it is possible that *Carpodacus erythrinus* might have chosen this peculiar food to avoid competition.

2. Though *Carpodacus erythrinus* serves as an agent in cross pollination when it visits flowers for nectar (Ali 1932), such chances are completely excluded here as:
 - i) Flowers are pollinated by wind (anemophilous).
 - ii) Birds visit the tree only after the flowering is almost over and fruits are formed on which the exudate is present.
3. Feeding by the rosefinch can be disadvantageous to the tree if it causes premature fall of the fruits.

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26. ON THE SYSTEMATIC POSITION OF THE SPECIES *POLYPEDATES PLEUROSTICTUS* (AMPHIBIA: RHACOPHORIDAE)

The 47 species of Indian tree frogs of the family Rhacophoridae are accommodated in three genera viz., *Philautus* (32 species), *Polypedates*

(3 species) and *Rhacophorus* (12 species). While studying the amphibians of southern Western Ghats, (Ravichandran, 1992), I had the opportunity to